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THEIR CHOICE



HENRIETTA DANA
SKINNER

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THEIR CHOICE



“I have wanted you, and you only, all my life!”
—*Page 173*

THEIR CHOICE

A NOVEL

BY

HENRIETTA DANA SKINNER

AUTHOR OF

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THEIR CHOICE

PART I

THEY

BOSTON, MAY 5TH.

IT is difficult to admit it, even to myself in the privacy of my own thoughts, but I am thirty-five years old! When I reached my thirtieth birthday I felt that, as a woman, I had stepped from youth to age, that life held nothing more for me of grace and gladness,

nothing but stern duties and advancing decrepitude! The years that have passed since I left the pleasant decade of the twenties have not reconciled me to the inroads of time. I feel young, I love the things of youth, yet for five years I have stood back, with what grace I could assume, from its pursuits and amusements, to give place to younger women in whom they are more becoming and appropriate. As a famous Irish writer says truly: "The tragedy of age is not that we are old, but that we are young!" Now I am entering the last half of my natural life—not as one who can renew her youth in the lives of her children and reap the harvest of experience in the

conduct of home and family, but as an “old maid” who has nursed her parents and grandparents till the end, and is now herself one of the older generation.

Yet I am far from being unhappy. I have no cowardly regrets. Since there has been no marriage made for me, in heaven or elsewhere, I can be very philosophical about it. As I look at the lives of my married friends, I feel that freedom from the matrimonial tie has its compensations. I do not covet my neighbors’ husbands. Nor am I sure that I even covet their children, though children in the abstract, especially tiny babies, pull at my heart-strings in their helplessness, their innocence, their

complete dependence upon the kindness and intelligence of others for their well-being and development. Their little ways appeal to me, and I long to do for them, to give them love and shelter and care. Yet, as a matter of fact, I am apt to find the concrete child disagreeable, tiresome, and badly brought up. The joys of matrimony and maternity have so often presented themselves to me under unlovely aspects that I am quite reconciled to being fated to dispense with them.

MAY 6TH.

Last night, between sleeping and waking, as if to reproach me for the selfish words I have written above, visions came to me. They were very real visions, and I am still trembling from the impression they have left upon me.

I scarcely saw them, but they had stolen in at the door somehow and were pressing about me, cuddling up to me and looking pleadingly at me out of big blue, anxious eyes.

“Take us into your arms,” they begged. “We are so tired of waiting!” Their voices were very cooing and gentle, and they snuggled up closer and closer. “We want to be mothered, we

want to love and be loved! We want to have little souls, that we may know and serve God and go to heaven at last! It is so hard to wait and wait outside in the dark and cold! Please take us!"

"You poor little lambs!" I cried. "How gladly I would take you if I could, but you have come to the wrong house! I am all alone in the world, while you know, dearies, that real, little earth-babies have not only a mother but a father, too! You must go, then, to some nice little new-made home, where you will find a kind young papa and mama, both eagerly waiting for you!"

But I could see, through a sort of mist, that they shook their heads and

their anxious blue eyes still looked pleadingly up at me from their round pink and white faces.

“God sent us here,” they persisted, in their cooing, sweet little voices. “We can not go anywhere else! Don’t you want us?”

“Oh, you little innocents! Of course I do!”

I threw out my arms to gather them in, but I could not reach them. They seemed to float away from my grasp. “There!” I said desperately. “You see how it is! I want you, and you want me, but what is to be done about it? Little lad and lassie, if divine Providence will not let you have any other mother than just me then you must go

back to the good God and ask Him to let you choose a papa to help me make a sweet little home for you. But listen, babies, it must be such a nice papa! kind-hearted, right-living, God-fearing, manly and loving, who will work for us and cherish us and be true to us. And we shall love and cherish him and make his home happy in return. Then God will bless our lives and will take our souls to be happy together with Him for all eternity!"

And it seemed to me that they smiled at each other, that the anxious look in their big, blue eyes turned to one of hope and joy, and they stole away as softly and mysteriously as they had come.

MAY 10TH.

I have gone over my past carefully, but I have no reproach to make myself. I am unfortunate,—or fortunate, according as one looks at it—in having ideals! For many years I have stood before my small social world as one eligible to matrimony, nor have I gone through the years unsought. If I did not take such chances as came to me it is not that I scorned matrimony,—on the contrary, I have great respect for marriage, great respect for myself, and, though the color of his eyes may be as heaven wills, I desire to have great respect—for my husband! Marriage has never seemed to me a lottery, to tempt one to venture his all, trusting to

luck for results. Other things in life we are born to, or have thrust upon us—the parents on whose mercy we are thrown, the brothers and sisters and neighbors we must perforce live among, the conditions of society in which we grow up through no choice of our own, the ties and duties of the state of life in which our lot is cast. But a husband is something we acquire deliberately. Like mortal sin, matrimony presupposes the free consent of the will. And it seems comparatively easy to foresee its results, for good or for evil, if we will but look beforehand, with open eyes, at ourselves, at the character of the man, at the surroundings into which he would lead us.

So I have gone over the past in retrospect, in the light of the vision that came to me, but I do not for one moment regret the few offers I rejected nor the many agreeable friendships which might have ripened into love but did not do so, possibly through fault of mine. I look at them through the blue eyes of the dream babies and, for one good reason or another, not one of them would I recall!

No; I feel that I am not accountable for my spinsterhood. It is not a woman's part to roam about in search of a desirable husband, and if divine Providence wished me to marry it should have sent me a suitable opportunity to do so before I was—thirty-five!

But this is absurd! I must not allow myself to become morbid about a mere dream. "That way madness lies." I will put it out of my mind and change the current of my thoughts.

My brother and his wife urge my joining them in Holland this summer. Of course, I know what this means. It is not for nothing that I have been through twenty years of maiden-aunthood! Gilbert has been three months at The Hague as a delegate at the Court of Arbitration, and I foresee that I shall stay there with him and the younger children while Eleanor and her eldest daughter are in Paris and Trouville and Saint-Moritz! I shall submit to my fate. It is one of the

periodical sacrifices that I offer up to my inheritance of a New England conscience. I have been to Europe six times and always in charge of invalids or of the children of relations! Shall I ever stay there for my own gratification?

JUNE 26TH.

My prophetic soul! Here I am at Scheveningen with Gilbert and two of his hopefuls, Alick, aged twenty, and Barbara, seventeen. Four days in the week Gilbert attends the Conference at The Hague, only twenty minutes' distant through lovely woods and avenues, but the other days and all his evenings are spent here with us, in the invigorating breezes of the North Sea.

Our hotel is the quietest and most exclusive of a number facing the ocean on the top of the high dunes that for a mile or more, on either side of the Kurzaal, are solidly built up from the beach in a succession of handsome stone terraces whose arcades are lined with

shops and cafés. We came here partly because it is quiet, partly because there are no Americans and English here, as we like the foreign atmosphere. We take luncheon and dinner in the beautiful enclosed terrace of the hotel restaurant facing the sea, which is more retired than the table d'hote, but also more dull! At the table d'hote, the foreigners, chiefly Dutch, Germans and Hungarians, all bow genially and start up cheerful conversation with their neighbors, but the restaurant is more formal and conventional. The little separate tables are daintily set with fruits, flowers, bonbons and colored lights; the waiters, gloved and in smart liveries, step about noiselessly.

We all partake solemnly of the delicious Dutch cooking, speak under our breath and feel that the sound of a laugh would jar on our sensibilities. We might as well be at our neighbor's funeral.

“Where is the corpse?” whispers Alick sepulchrally. I giggle, then am ashamed, for Barbara looks disturbed by my want of dignity. It is so difficult to live up to the standards of one's nieces!

“Sh-sh!” she whispers reproachfully, “they will say we have no manners. They are so critical of Americans!”

Our immediate neighbors are, at the table to our right, a young Frenchman

and his wife with their two dear little well-bred, smiling girlies. On the left is a longer table, where sit a substantial-looking Bavarian baron and his wife with their four young people, rosy and more or less attractive. The baron is also a delegate to the Court of Arbitration, and we have met the family pleasantly in the social life of The Hague.

The table facing me has hitherto been unoccupied, but to-night a distinguished-looking man, some fifty years of age, is in possession. He is large, ruddy, and robust, his gray hair is cut short, his gray mustache is of military cut, and he has fine, gray eyes that were probably hazel when he was younger. They are large and well-formed and

have a lively, pleasant expression. His profile is good, the nose Roman but well-cut. Though he is somewhat stout and a bit puffy about the eyes and double about the chin and back of the neck, yet he has withal a strikingly distinguished and high-bred air. He is evidently an aristocrat, a man of the great world, and at once establishes himself as the most interesting personality in the room. The wonder is how one man can so change the whole atmosphere about him. The restaurant, in spite of its dainty appointments, had been dull and commonplace. But this man appears and lo! at once the room becomes elegant, exclusive, brilliant, and we feel it a privi-

lege to be there. Yet nothing could be more quiet and unobtrusive than his dress and manner.

While I am covertly studying him, he has been joined at the table by a younger man, about twenty-seven or twenty-eight years of age, probably a son, judging from his air of deference to the older man and the general likeness between them, which is very marked. The younger man, however, lacks the elegance, the poise, the courtly, aristocratic air of the father. It is hard to say where the difference lies. He is correctly dressed, his bearing is gentlemanly, his strong, well-built frame is less stout than the older man's, his hair

and mustache grow in exactly the same way. His profile is, if anything, more neat and fine-cut. Yet somehow his square, well-featured but deeply sunburnt countenance lends no added grace or distinction to the scene. He appears somewhat shy and reserved. Both men began their meal in silence and looked indifferent if not bored. Perhaps they, too, found the atmosphere depressing! Later they woke up a little and began talking together in German with some animation and geniality, the father's keen gray eyes dancing with good-humor. He is certainly a very charming man.

JUNE 30TH.

The pretty and ceremonious manners of the Dutch and the Germans undeniably lend great charm to human intercourse. How much more Christian and friendly it is to acknowledge each other's existence with bows and greetings and kindly courtesies after the custom of these genial foreigners. We, who go through life less graciously, lose much of its significance. For instance, our new neighbors, the father and son, passing by us to their seats at table on the second day, took the first position for a ceremonious bow. I understand German etiquette and know that this does not imply a desire for acquaintance, but is the usual courteous form-

ality observed in public places. Barbara, however, stared coldly, Gilbert and Alick wholly ignored them, and I hesitated just a moment too long, so that they turned away and now pass us by without a look. I am sorry it happened so, for as we have now met all our other neighbors in the restaurant, theirs is the only table with which we do not exchange greetings as we pass, and it is getting to be rather marked.

In the privacy of our sitting-room Barbara took me severely to ask:

“How could you make such a goose of yourself at table?” she said with scant reverence for her elder. “You were actually on the point of bowing to those men!”

“Oh, come, come!” interposed Gilbert good-naturedly, “give your aunt some credit for a little knowledge of the world, and trust her to do the correct thing. She understands foreign ways better than we.”

“I don’t want to understand their foreign ways,” persisted Barbara. “That old *roué* of a father glances over at us with most disgusting familiarity, and the red-faced son, who looks as if he drank like a fish, seems to think we are freaks, from the insolent way he stares.”

I was aghast. Barbara, at seventeen, knows so much more about men than I do at thirty-five! It had never occurred to me that the father was a *roué* or the

son a drunkard, or that there was any insolent familiarity in the look of interest with which they occasionally regard us.

Gilbert shook his head in surprised dissent. "Those two Austrians are attending one of the conferences at The Hague," he said. "I have seen them frequently there, and they appear to be very gentlemanly, decent and self-respecting—not at all the sort of men you think."

"Oh!" broke in Alick, with the contemptuous superiority of twenty, "Barbara is no judge! She thinks any man is a *roué* who looks stout and well-fed. And if a young fellow is healthy and athletic, and spends his days swimming

and sailing and horseback-riding till he gets a fine coat of sunburn, then she jumps to the conclusion that he must drink like a fish!"

"That young man is no *viveur*," said Gilbert thoughtfully, "but a sterling, fine fellow! It is enough to look into his eyes to be convinced of that! He is stalwart and hearty and every inch a man, yet he has the eyes of a frank, innocent, clean-minded schoolboy. A man must lead a mighty good life to preserve such an expression in his eyes at thirty years of age!"

There came to my mind the words of Holy Scripture: "He that could have transgressed and hath not transgressed, that could do evil and hath

not done it,—who is he and we will praise him? for he hath done wonderful things in his life!"

I felt the tears rush to my eyes. I have such foolish ideals! I care so much, I have always cared so much for these ideals! We women are good as a matter of course, for goodness is as indispensable in a woman as honesty in a man. There is no place in the family life for the woman who is not good, just as there is no place in the community life for the man who is dishonest. Human society demands it of us and it is the only policy. But there are men and women who are good from another motive,—because God demands it and because it is indispensable to the

heavenly life! Ah, my heart! who is such a man and I will praise him? for it is indeed a wonderful thing!

I must be sure to notice that young man's eyes when we next are in the dining-room.

JULY 2D.

I have noticed them, as well as I can, when I never look toward him without finding them fixed on me with a grave but perfectly inoffensive interest. It is long since I have seen interest or admiration in young men's eyes! However, an amusing explanation occurs to me. Perhaps the father is a widower and the young fellow is thinking that I should make a good-natured, friendly sort of stepmother.

But Gilbert is right. His eyes are certainly beautiful! They do not attract one's notice as quickly as the father's, which are so full of vivacity and humor, but one is conscious of a certain spirituality, an unexpected re-

finement and poetry in the sensible, manly, sunburnt countenance which one can not explain, until suddenly the eyes open widely and frankly and look you in the face with an honest, steady gaze. Then you see that they are beautifully formed and blue as the cornflower, with a certain grave brightness, a gentle seriousness that is almost sadness. But they are not the eyes of a schoolboy! No, they are rather those of a thoughtful, observing, comprehending man, whose sturdy, upright young life has taught him the truth of the revised proverb, "Be virtuous and you will be—lonely!"

JULY 3D.

Barbara and I had wandered far on the beach this morning after our bath, when a squall of wind and rain burst on us with such suddenness and torrential force that we were glad to creep into the shelter of a bathing-machine, which a bare-footed, red-trouserred life-saver opened for us. But our quarters were so cramped and stuffy that as soon as there came a comparative lull in the tempest we thought to seek refuge in the covered galleries of the lower terraces, and ran across the beach and up the first flight of steps. But alas! between us and the shelter of the arcade lay the wide, stone-paved street, now a river of rushing water. A goodly crowd

was huddled together under the protecting roof of the gallery opposite, and they watched our predicament with true Dutch stolidity. All at once we saw the sturdy figure of our blue-eyed fellow-guest plunge into the flood and come wading across toward us. In the most matter-of-fact manner, as if he were merely offering me a chair, the young man placed his folded mackintosh under my feet, for the water had overflowed on to the sidewalk, then quietly turned to Barbara, picked her up and waded across the street with her to the arcade. Then he came back for me. I had intended to rebel, but his eyes met mine so frankly and sensibly that I simply said nothing at all,

and was also picked up, carried across like a child and deposited in a dry spot. I was just finding my tongue and Barbara was starting to pour forth voluble thanks to our deliverer when he turned away awkwardly, merely touching his hat, and started back to the rescue of his mackintosh.

All this while, the stolid Dutch crowd showed but slight interest and no emotion. A French or an Italian crowd would have been all sympathy and attention, but here the episode seemed to produce no impression whatever, and as our deliverer himself acted with common sense and in a matter-of-course manner, I felt as if show of feeling on our part was quite unlooked-for. And

he gave us no opportunity to show any, for in returning he crossed far from where we were standing and disappeared in the crowd.

“He has ruined his clothes!” exclaimed Barbara in admiration. “He was soaked to the knees in muddy water, not to mention the mackintosh! Sir Walter Raleigh isn’t in it with this young man!”

“I trust we shall be lucky enough to run across him during the day. It is dreadful to think that neither of us got out a word of thanks!” I said. “Your father must get Baron Falkner to introduce him this evening so that you can show your gratitude to your Sir Walter.”

“*My* Sir Walter!” grinned Barbara.
“It is *you* that he always stares at!”

“Nonsense!” I said sharply. “Young men do not ruin their clothes for old maids of thirty-five!”

“Except queens,” she returned, “and you are his Queen Elizabeth!”

There was no meeting, accidental or otherwise, during the afternoon, therefore we took pains to bow to both father and son on entering the restaurant this evening. For a moment they looked startled, as if they could not believe their eyes. They half rose, and the father succeeded in giving a fair sample of a bow, but the son looked simply dazed. However, they both redeemed themselves later, for finishing

before us, they rose from their chairs and in true German fashion drew their heels together and bowed deeply and courteously to each one of us. When we acknowledged their salute they bowed once again, then turned and left the room together, the son with his usual deference opening the door for his father.

JULY 5TH.

Our bow led to nothing, for when Gilbert sought them out later they had gone! That was their last meal here and the ceremonious salute was a sort of silent farewell! It is curious how dull the restaurant seems again without the father's distinguished presence and the grave, friendly regard of the son's beautiful eyes! Baron Falkner tells me that the economic conference they were attending is over, and surprised me by saying it was the son, not the father, who was the delegate!

“The young man is going to make his mark,” he said. “His relatives are manufacturers of engineering machinery and he has studied the business

not only from a scientific and economic but also from a philanthropic point of view, and has introduced a system of self-government and profit-sharing among the employees that has attracted attention. I heard him explain it before the conference the other day. He is a manly chap, sensible and shrewd, and his explanation was very lucid and concise, yet with a touch of sentiment that made a sympathetic impression."

"So he is a manufacturer, and I fancied they were aristocrats!" I exclaimed. A queer look passed over the baron's face, but he made no comment.

JULY 6TH.

I had the curiosity to look up their names in the hotel's register. They are entered simply as "Adolf and Klemens Daun, from Vienna." No title, not even the aristocratic "Von." Appearances are certainly deceptive!

JULY 7TH.

Barbara sought me out to-day with an "I told you so!" air.

"It's a good thing those men left before we struck up an acquaintance," she announced. "It turns out they are not respectable!"

"Not respectable!" I exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes, not respectable! Didn't I feel instinctively that the old man was a *roué*? It seems he is some grandee or other, and that he is traveling *incognito* with that son, whom he doesn't recognize under his own name because he isn't really his son,—that is—er—I

mean, he wasn't legally married to his mother."

"Why, Barbara! Who told you such a thing?" I asked rather faintly, for I had a misgiving that this might account for the undefinable difference in the bearing of the two men.

"Melanie Falkner. She didn't seem to mind. She said she was sorry the son hadn't any rank, as otherwise he would be a good match, for he was well off and a very fine fellow, but that is all the feeling she showed in the matter, and I was so shocked! She talked very openly of it, though she called it euphoniously, 'a morganatic union!'"

"Oh! I see!" I cried, intensely re-

lieved. “That explains it! Why, Barbara, it is your misapprehension! A ‘morganatic’ marriage is a perfectly respectable, lawful, Christian marriage, as sacred and binding as any other! It only means a marriage where the wife is not of equal rank with the husband and therefore their children can not inherit the father’s rank and title. It is not uncommon in Germany among royalty and the old families of the ‘high nobility.’ The heir to the Austrian throne, a devout Catholic, is so married.”

Barbara looked unconvinced. “Oh, you think it is all right, do you?” she said, going off with a scornful smile. She has supreme contempt for what she

considers my ignorance of the world. I did not argue with her; there is no use. She has got to learn some things for herself.

JULY 9TH.

Three rainy days by the seashore,
cut off from one's usual occupations,
have a trying effect on the disposition.
I know I have been cross and I think
the others have been so, too! The
dear little French girlies have left,
and I do not care how soon we also leave
this stupid place!

JULY 10TH.

This morning I walked out alone in the rain, enjoying a battle with the storm on the dunes. Coming home the clouds began to lift. As I turned into the lower terrace I saw a rather stately form in long raincoat coming lightly down the broad steps toward me. The stranger was somewhat heavily built, but erect and manly of bearing, with good, straight limbs and comely, well-featured countenance. He had a certain agreeable air of energy and decision, together with—

No! he is not a stranger! I had never before seen him in overcoat and bowler hat, and his complexion has toned down to a healthy brown, so the advanc-

ing figure seemed unfamiliar, but as soon as I encountered the serious friendly gaze of those wonderful, bright blue eyes, I should have recognized Klemens Daun at the antipodes. Dear me! how pleasant it was to see a familiar face in a strange land! I bowed quite joyously and, forgetting entirely that we had never exchanged a syllable, held out my hand cordially. Off went the bowler hat, my hand was taken respectfully in his, and bending low over it he kissed it with reverent chivalry. Shall I ever get used to these foreign ways? I ought to have remembered that upper-class Germans never shake a lady's hand!

Herr Klemens has a straightforward,

modest manliness that is very attractive, and asking permission to walk home with me, he began chatting easily and pleasantly, relieving my embarrassment and making me feel perfectly at home with him. He is evidently very observing and shrewd, with a deal of dry wit, half cynical, half good-natured. Mounting to the upper terrace, we found his father pacing up and down, waiting for him. I fancied I detected a look of amazement in Herr Daun's lively gray eyes, but he quickly suppressed it, bowed, and kissed my hand. Being prepared, I received this salute with more grace and equanimity than the former. He is certainly a very agreeable man, the father, I mean.

With all his air of aristocratic elegance he is very simple, easy, and frank, and has the perfect manner that makes you feel not so much that he is saying and doing the right thing, as that you yourself are doing so! I was sorry when our all too short walk came to an end and much disappointed to find they were no longer staying at our hotel.

“We found too much gayety and conventionality at Ostend,” explained Herr Daun. “We are quite old fogeys, who prefer black cravats to white. We came back here at a few hours’ notice and had to get accommodations where we could.”

But in spite of his air of frankness, I knew this was a fib, for the suite

which they occupied on the first floor is still vacant and Herr Klemens said to me at parting, with some timidity of manner:

“We feared to intrude ourselves upon you in returning, but since you have remembered us so kindly we trust you will permit us to come over as informally as if we were still fellow-guests.”

JULY 11TH.

That same afternoon Baron Falkner came up to Gilbert and me with Herr Daun and went through a formal introduction. The latter was very ceremonious with Gilbert, exchanging cards and referring him to the Austrian Legation for a certificate of character, as it were. Gilbert teased me about it afterward.

“I felt as if I were receiving an offer for your hand,” he declared.

“He is much more likely to be thinking of Barbara for his son!” I retorted. “We do not even know if he is a widower! He is quite right in supposing you would not wish the ladies of your family to take up with mere chance acquaintances.”

“Nevertheless, I advise you to be thinking seriously whether you wish to spend the remainder of your natural life in Austria,” teased Gilbert.

“I did not know you were so anxious to get rid of me,” I laughed. “But, if you wish me to marry, why not an American?”

Gilbert shrugged his shoulders. “You have been thirty-five years about it and haven’t married an American yet!” he observed drily. After Herr Daun left, Baron Falkner told us about his marriage. He comes honestly by his aristocratic air. It seems he belongs to a family celebrated in German history, the Altgraves of Daun-Kyrburg. They were formerly sovereign rulers, now

“mediatized,” that is, they belong to the highest order of nobility, but retain many of the privileges of sovereigns, and also, it appears, some of the penalties. For an Altgraf of Kyrburg may not marry any one not entitled to sixteen quarterings of nobility, otherwise neither wife nor children can bear his title or be received on an equality with him in court or social circles. But Altgraf Adolf married a young woman from a family of manufacturers, and as his wife could not share his rank and privileges he dropped them all and threw in his lot with her people, renouncing his title, resigning his position at court in the Imperial Guard and taking a post in the civil service,

where he has proved himself a man of ability and character, and has brought up the son to a life of industry.

“I admire him for that!” declared Alick. “He is a plucky old chap, worthy to be an American, marrying for love, working his way in the world and not willing to have his wife’s position lower than his own. He is the right stuff!”

The baron, however, is an aristocrat and scarcely seems to appreciate this view. Barbara also failed to share Alick’s enthusiasm, though apparently satisfied now that the two men are “respectable.”

“What a shame they can not be noble!” she whispered to me regret-

fully. “‘Altgravine’ would be such a pretty title and so unusual! You could have married the Altgraf—I am sure he likes you from the way he watches you out of the corner of his eyes—and I would have set my cap for the son. He is quite good-looking now the sunburn has worn off. But of course, one doesn’t care to marry a foreigner if he has no title. Besides, Vienna is so far away!”

“Far away—from what?” I suggested drily, thinking of the historic charms and social graces of this great center of the arts and sciences of modern civilization. But the irony of my remark was lost—for Barbara is a Boston girl!

JULY 12TH.

This evening, four little Dutch peasant children, bare-headed, in wooden shoes, came trudging along the upper terrace by the restaurant windows. Emboldened by a friendly smile from me, they pressed their chubby, dirty faces against the glass and looked with hungry, wistful eyes at the dishes of fruits, bonbons and little cakes that decorated our table. I tried to make them understand by signs that I would come outside and bring them some, and they went off happily to stand waiting by the front entrance. But the pompous hall-porter reproved them threateningly and drove them away. As they scampered down the road I came out,

full of rebellion and concern, and appealed to the porter to whistle them back. The dignified functionary was too polite to refuse, but it was so vague and mild a whistle that I understood from it that I was wrong in encouraging little vagabonds to linger about the hotel. I was greatly disappointed to see the poor babies turn round a distant corner out of sight. I hate to fail any one, especially little children who confide in me.

As I stood gazing blankly after them I heard a voice by my side and there was Herr Klemens, hat in hand, asking if he could be of any assistance.

“Oh, if you please!” I cried eagerly. “I promised them the bonbons and they

will be so disappointed, poor little mites!"

In an instant he started off rapidly and soon disappeared round the corner after them. I followed, half walking, half running, and arriving breathless at the corner nearly bumped into him as he returned with four timid, solemnly expectant Dutch infants trudging by his side. I divided the goodies, and they received them in their dirty little outstretched paws with true Dutch stolidity, then with a shy little scrape of the wooden shoes, intended, I suppose, by way of thanks, they turned and scampered off again.

"I do not like to disappoint children," I explained as we sauntered

homeward. "We have such a tremendous responsibility toward those little ones. We so often deceive them with false threats or false hopes and then expect from them nothing but honor and truth. But I suppose that in the eyes of the hall-porter I have done a great wrong and encouraged them in lawless ways that may lead to future punishment for them!"

"Do not be troubled! They are too happy in the present to think of the future. This glimpse into heaven will satisfy them for a long time," he said with decision.

"Then you do not believe that I have sown the seeds of discontent?"

"No, indeed!" he replied with a short

laugh. "Envy and covetousness are the sins of grown-ups. These little things do not reason out the differences in their lot and ours. A vision of bonbons and flowers and beautiful ladies is to them what a fairy-tale or a Christmas-tree was to you in your childhood, a source of wonder and enjoyment, something to be dreamed of with awe and happiness, but never reasoned about."

"You comfort me!" I said. "And now, look! I divided the bonbons equally, so that there should be no heart-burnings, and I have two left over. They are your reward," and I handed them to him.

He took only one. "We also will share equally," he suggested. I laughed

assentingly and, taking the chocolate out of its nest of fringed pink paper, I ate it and carelessly threw the paper away. Herr Klemens also ate his chocolate, but, more tidy than I, smoothed out the paper neatly, folded it up and—tucked it in his vest-pocket.

Well! why was I so surprised? Did I suppose that he would eat the paper and pocket the bonbon?

As we drew up to the veranda, I thought I could see looks of reproach in the eyes of the young Dutch and German girls sitting there. I fancied I could hear them say, "That old maid ought to get on a shelf and stay there, and not be beguiling the young men away from us!" I know that look and

I know that there is justice in their claim. I have had my chances, now they should have theirs!

So I sat down with the older Falkners and Herr Daun, who were having coffee together, and I entered cheerily into conversation with them, quite ignoring my late companion, hoping he would now feel free to leave me and join the young people. But he did not budge, though he took no part in the conversation and looked rather depressed. Yet he had been so genial and sympathetic but a moment ago!

JULY 13TH.

Herr Klemens has taken my breath away by inviting me to go with him tomorrow afternoon to the open-air performance of a new pastoral operetta at the fashionable club of The Hague,—a very exclusive, invitational affair. I hesitated to accept, for somehow I felt queer about going alone with him. Not that I am young enough to need matronizing, but why should he ask me? Is it possible he thinks me younger than I am?

JULY 14TH.

Herr Daun came up last evening, evidently much hurt that I should hesitate to accept his son's invitation.

“I beg you to believe that Klemens is a very honorable young man,” he said, “and that any lady who was with him would meet with the utmost courtesy. It will be quite correct on this informal occasion to go alone with a gentleman or he would not have asked you to do so.”

“Oh, it is not that!” I stammered, for it was really rather hard to say just what it was. But if Herr Klemens thinks me to be of his own age, I must undeceive him at once, so I bravely

determined to come out with the truth to his father and added frankly:

“I have every confidence in your son, and am not so foolish as to wish to be matronized at thirty-five years of age!”

The Altgraf was too polite to turn a hair. He did not appear in the least startled by my announcement. Doubtless I look my age and he had long suspected it. Consoling thought!

“It is the age of a woman’s most perfect, most gracious development,” he said gallantly. Then looking at me narrowly he asked: “If you find Klemens too young, would you accept me as an escort in his place?”

“Oh, willingly!” I replied with alacrity. But I thought he looked a bit

amused, as if I were treating him like a grandfather. In reality, I fear I have only jumped from the frying-pan into the fire, for if I have established myself as too old for the son, it only makes me a more suitable age for the father!

JULY 15TH.

It ended in my having two escorts, for both men went with me and gave me a very charming afternoon. Perhaps Herr Klemens felt that he must chaperon his father! At any rate I was often rather embarrassingly conscious that the young man's eyes were regarding me with a look half-reproachful, half-wistful, and to me wholly unaccountable, unless indeed, that grave, pleading look was saying: "My father and I are chums. Would you come between us to drive me from my home?"

JULY 23D.

With Gilbert so much at The Hague, and Barbara and Alick taken up by some young Americans at the next hotel, I am left wholly to my own resources. I should be very lonely if Baron Falkner and his wife were not so extremely kind to me. They quite insist on my sharing in all their pursuits and I certainly enjoy doing so. The two Austrian gentlemen usually join us and we are almost like one big family riding, swimming, sailing, attending the concerts together. As to the Altgraf, he and I are already the best of friends. Gilbert and Alick like to tease me about my "conquest," but there is absolutely no sentiment in our

friendship. He is a delightful companion and a distinguished and brilliant man, who has the gift of making you feel in his company as if you, too, were distinguished and brilliant!

Herr Klemens, I should think, would find it a little stupid to be constantly with our party, we are all so much older than he. It would be jollier for him with the younger Falkners, or with Barbara and her friends, but he sticks to his father like a burr, and consequently is always with our group.

JULY 24TH.

I suggested to Barbara this morning that she should introduce Herr Klemens to her young friends and have him included in their excursions and entertainments. He is very gentlemanly and is fond of sports. She stared at me queerly for a moment, then said contemptuously: "Huh! we do not care to play your game for you!"

"My what?" I asked, reddening.

She did not wish to explain, but I insisted upon an answer. At last she said grudgingly:

"It is as plain as a hole in a ladder that you have eyes for no one but the father, and would like to get the son out of your way!"

“How absurd!” I cried. But I have been wondering ever since if it indeed appears so to others?

3

JULY 26TH.

I shall not attach much importance to Barbara's words. She probably does not care to take up Herr Klemens, because her new friends have introduced her to some dashing young German officers with high-sounding titles, who wear smart clothes, drive fine horses, drink champagne freely and are very gallant and devoted to the girls, whose heads are completely turned by their attentions. Barbara is persuaded that she is in very aristocratic company and quite looks down on an untitled civilian like Herr Klemens!

JULY 30TH.

I am afraid I have indeed jumped into the fire, for to-day Herr Daun, who has never before talked personalities, startled me by saying:

“I know little of your life—yet I venture to say that you may have had passing fancies, but no serious attachment.”

This was true, yet how should he know it?

“You have had admirers, you have had proposals of marriage,” he continued, “but your heart has never been deeply touched, and it has cost you little to put them aside at the command of conscience or the counsel of reason.”

“I neither admit nor deny it,” I re-

turned wonderingly, "but may I ask from what you infer all this?

"You are a very attractive woman," he replied, "a fascinating companion, with the halo of a lovely character shining about your face—a woman that thoughtful men might easily idolize and idealize. More perhaps do so than you know! Such a woman would not pass through life unsought, but you bear no traces of the bitterness or the heart-sorrow of an unhappy attachment. Yet," he added, turning to me gravely, "even where one has loved ardently in youth, a second and very devoted attachment is not out of the question. Surely a woman of your sympathetic nature would understand this?"

Coming from a widower this seemed a bit personal, and I was much relieved that at this juncture Gilbert sauntered up to us, putting an end to sentimental problems.

JULY 31ST.

Poor Barbara had a disagreeable experience at the weekly ball at the Casino. I had gone with the older people—as an onlooker merely, for I ceased waltzing at thirty—and Barbara had preferred to go with her Cincinnati friends. Toward the end of the ball one of the gay German officers she has been flirting with became a little the gayer for champagne, and made himself somewhat noisy and conspicuous. He came up to claim a dance with her, and when she wished to excuse herself, grew rather unpleasantly insistent. Herr Klemens saw her predicament, crossed the room hastily, bowed and held out his hand to her, saying boldly to the

officer, "This dance is mine!" Barbara turned to him eagerly, and they started to waltz at once, the young officer going off muttering in an ugly way that filled me with apprehension.

It surprised me to see Herr Klemens waltzing with so much skill and grace. I had not supposed him to be a society man, though the Austrians are famous dancers. Yet he and his father had sat by me the whole evening and the young man had never once asked if I would care to waltz! Oh, Youth! how scornful you are of Middle Age!

As we were starting homeward, I saw the two young officers looking threateningly toward Herr Klemens. Fearing some revengeful trick, I turned to

him and asked him to give me his arm down the steps. Surely they would not venture to insult him in a lady's presence! But the father's eyes were as quick as mine, and whispering: "Don't be alarmed, I will settle those young fellows!" Herr Daun left us and went off toward them.

How he "settled" them, I could not see and do not know, but when he rejoined us later on the homeward road he nodded reassuringly at me, with a merry twinkle in his handsome gray eyes as if he had somewhat enjoyed his encounter. He is a quick-witted man of the world, and would understand how to deal with such young bloods.

AUG 1ST.

What a morning! When I pulled up the Venetian blinds at seven o'clock, I was startled to see Herr Klemens run like a madman across the square toward the station and jump into the electric train that was pulling out.

“For heaven’s sake, what can be the matter?” I thought nervously. I grew more apprehensive as time went on. Not only was Herr Klemens absent, but neither Herr Daun nor Baron Falkner made their appearance after breakfast, and later Barbara wandered disconsolately back from the Baileys’ rooms with the report that the young officers had gone off, no one knew whither. I seemed to foresee what was coming

when Baroness Falkner called me aside, mysteriously.

“Don’t let your niece know,” she whispered, “she will feel so distressed! Otto is to be Herr Daun’s second, and will do everything he can to arrange matters.”

“A duel!” I gasped, and I could feel my knees shake under me. “But I thought his father settled the matter last night?”

“It is the father who is going to fight,” explained the baroness.

“The father?” I gasped again. “But it was Herr Klemens who offended Captain von Marrels!”

“I know it, but these young officers are such firebrands and so insolent!

They were lying in wait to insult Klemens before all you ladies, and then meant to refuse him any redress because he is a civilian and not of their rank. Altgraf Adolf saw through their plan and forestalled matters by himself insulting them. As he is a high noble and a retired officer they were forced in honor to challenge him. They all went off together at five this morning."

"But how can Herr Klemens permit his father to fight for him?" I exclaimed indignantly.

"He knew nothing about it. His father teased him and made merry with him last evening about his gallantry, and never let him suspect that anything was wrong. When the poor lad woke

up to find the Altgraf gone he was like one beside himself. He has rushed after them, but it will all be over long before he can get there. My dear, how pale you look! Yes, it is very distressing, I know, but we must hope that all will be amicably settled. Sit down, dear, and take my vinaigrette. There is nothing we can do."

No, there was nothing we could do, nothing but wait, wait and hope for the best, but I was so faint, so sick at heart, that I could only creep off to a corner of the rear veranda, where I thought no one would notice me, and watch miserably for the trains as they came in every half hour from the capital. Such things should not be permitted!

Duels were sheer murder! Would Herr Klemens arrive on the scene to find his father injured, perhaps dead, and then do something desperate in revenge?

PART II

WE

I HAD conjured up every sort of horror, when suddenly a voice close by my side exclaimed: "Ah, there you are! I am so sorry you should have been told!"

I sprang up, but sat down again hastily, for I was almost as faint from the intensity of my relief as I had been before from anxiety. I held out my hand, the Altgraf kissed it respectfully, but I could say no more than a whispered "Thank God."

"You should not have had this

anxiety," he said kindly. "I was not deceiving you last night when I gave you to understand that all was well. The whole affair was that what you call a 'bluff' on my part. I knew the young man would come to his senses after a night's consultation with his pillow."

"Duels are stupid and wicked things!" I interrupted petulantly.

"Wicked, possibly not always stupid!" replied Herr Daun thoughtfully. "I am no duellist, but I recognize that the impulse to fight is strong in unregenerate human nature, and it is sometimes well it should be restrained by the stringent codes of duelling, otherwise revenge may and often does lead to worse things. But

the seconds are ever anxious for conciliation. This little affair was quickly adjusted. The young officer was sobered and ashamed and not at all anxious to fight an older man. I was satisfied to have warded off an insult to my son which he would have been powerless to resent effectively, and I was quite ready to apologize to the young officer if he would first express regret for his offensive conduct toward your niece. Our seconds talked it over. We apologized mutually and shook hands all round. No one is worse; some one may possibly be better for this little 'affair of honor.' "

He paused. Then, seating himself beside me, resumed earnestly: "Never

have I regretted sacrificing my rank and position, so far as I alone am concerned, for I received far more than I gave. But I do passionately regret that I could not share them with wife and children, especially at moments such as these, when some insolent upstart would take cowardly advantage of my son's lack of rank. Then I get enraged! I do not usually interfere in Klemens' affairs, in fact he is in a bad humor to-day because I did so, but I, only, am in a position to fight such enemies, and for Klemens I would fight with the desperation of a tigress defending her young!"

I could believe it, for he looked grim and gloomy.

“We are united by no common ties,” he continued. “In youth I had not, by nature or by grace, the sturdy character of my son. I was worldly and pleasure-loving, and heaven knows in what worse than folly I might have ended had not a pure and noble love early led me by the hand to the throne of God and the vision of an exquisite womanhood.” Here he uncovered his head, as if on holy ground. I could see he was coming to matters which he could hardly bring himself to speak about.

“For sixteen years I learned the lessons of life, the joys and the cares of marriage and paternity, the duties and obligations of a new career, by her side and among her people. Then came

the blow. I had the lesson of sorrow to learn and I must learn it alone! There was an epidemic of fever. Our eldest boy, Ernst, my pride and my joy, was taken first, but I hardly felt his loss in my agonized fear for my wife. When she, too, was taken, I was so stunned that I had no tear to shed when I stood by the death-bed of our youngest child, my darling little daughter. The physicians feared for my reason. Nothing roused me till they told me that Klemens, too, was ill—Klemens, his mother's favorite, with her beautiful eyes and her sincere and loyal nature. I was frantic. I felt that she was calling upon me to save him. I roused myself, God gave me strength;

I saved the boy, and in saving him I saved myself. Do you wonder that from that day to this we have been inseparable?—that I could lay down my life for him?"

His voice broke. Two great tears rolled down his cheeks; he sprang up from the seat. "Forgive me!" he said hoarsely. "I had intended to tell you more, far more, but I find I can not speak now. I must leave you!" and pulling his hat down over his eyes he turned away abruptly, and walked off with hurried, uneven steps.

* * * *

It left me tremulous, uncertain and rather unhappy. I have not appreciated Altgraf Adolf hitherto. I have

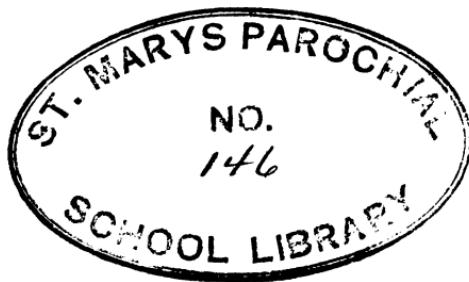
admired his superficial qualities, his high-bred air, his charm of conversation, his genial humor, his sympathetic manner, but I had regarded him only as a man of the world. I had thought little of the deeper springs of his character, of the experiences and sufferings inevitable in over fifty years of human life. He has told me much that was sacred, he had meant to tell me more, and I knew instinctively that he does not easily speak of his deepest emotions,—that the one to whom he thus opened his heart must be a friend chosen above many.

And it is this thought that makes me unhappy!

AUGUST 2D.

Captain von Marrels and his friend called this morning to say good-by, as they are leaving for the maneuvers. Barbara was not at home, in fact I have a suspicion that they had chosen this hour, knowing her to have gone into The Hague with Gilbert. The young man had on his prettiest, most beaming and ceremonious German high-life manners—manners that make a woman feel as if she were a queen,—or an angel! He made an apology for his offense of the other evening with becoming humility, and incidentally let out the fact that he is a married man! He declares himself devoted to his wife and child, but had not thought it neces-

sary to mention their existence before, as he had understood that American girls attached no importance to summer flirtations!



AUGUST 3D.

I rode out this afternoon with Alick and the two Dauns. Both the Austrians look extremely well on horseback, for though solidly built they are well-proportioned and erect, carry themselves with dignity and are perfectly at ease in the saddle. We had a fine scamper over the dunes, Alick and Herr Klemens putting their horses through scary-looking jumps and climbs. Later we turned into the pine woods and rode slowly, two by two, through the narrow bridlepaths of the park. I purposely pushed my horse next to Herr Klemens, for Barbara's words have left me a bit sensitive. I do not wish them to think that I avoid him in order to be more with his father!

The young man seemed so startled by my voluntarily approaching him that at first he was tongue-tied, but when I rallied him on his crustiness toward the young people he recovered himself and grew quite communicative and friendly.

“They would not welcome me long,” he said decidedly. “I do not know how to talk ‘small talk’; motor-cars are to me exactly like electric trains—a means of rapid locomotion, and no more. I do not boston, and I like serious music better than musical comedy. You can see at once that they would vote me stupid! On the other hand there are things I am interested in where I should find them stupid.”

No doubt! I perceive that Herr

Klemens is critical and exacting! “Can you be friends only with those who share your tastes?” I asked.

“Heaven forbid! How monotonous!” he replied with a short laugh. “It is half friendship to exchange points of view.”

“Ah, but,” I objected, “you and your father are the closest of friends and yet you seem to be absolutely congenial in your tastes.”

“That is exactly an instance in point!” he insisted. “We have in reality many divergent interests, and few pursuits in common. We fence and play billiards daily, we ride and walk and attend the theater together, I accompany him fishing, as he enjoys

the sport, and he goes to concerts with me because I am music-mad, and he listens very patiently to my raptures. But there we separate, and the interest of friendly discussion comes in. He is an aristocrat and I am a burgher. He was brought up in the great world and his sympathies are there. I was brought up to a life of industry, and fashionable court life would bore me to extinction. He reads the political and social news and novels. I read scientific journals and—poetry! He plays whist and pool with his cronies at the Club, I and mine find our recreation in skating, bowling, wrestling, target-shooting, mountain-climbing and chorus-singing.”

“But, after fifty, you, too, may find

charm in cards and novels and comfortable chairs in cosy club-corners!" I suggested laughingly.

"Perhaps so," he returned pleasantly, "but my life is spent so much amid machinery that I fancy I shall always fly to nature for recreation. That is why nothing engine-driven appeals to me as sport. I would rather ride a horse than guide a motor. I have no wish to be lifted in the air by noisy mechanism, but like to sail over the sea with no motion but that of the waves, no sound but the rush of wind and water. That is rest and delight!"

"Then your business must be unsympathetic to you?" I ventured.

"How can I explain to you that I

find it intensely sympathetic?" he replied thoughtfully. "There is the scientific interest I take in it as a student of engineering and enconomics: Then, behind the machinery, there are—the men! I have eight hundred directly under my personal charge."

"Ah! I see!" I exclaimed softly and comprehendingly, "that opens up an almost endless vista of responsibilities and interests."

He turned his blue eyes on me inquiringly. "Would you care to hear what we are trying to do?" he asked almost shyly.

I had struck his hobby, and indeed it is one of my own. For over an hour we discussed how to do enough for em-

ployees without lessening their initiatve and self-respect, how to bring them under good influences yet not interfere with their liberty and responsibility, what to do in the spirit of brotherhood and Christian charity and what as a matter of business cooperation. For once I found the son more interesting than the father.

So interested was I, in fact, that I utterly forgot my horse, and when a partridge whirred across the path I was quite unprepared for his sudden swerve, and to feel him rising up into the air under me, and myself sliding, slipping off his back into—nothingness.

I had no consciousness of striking the ground, no consciousness of any-

thing except feeling rather drowsy and too stupid to open my eyes. Gradually the sound of a voice, uttering passionate exclamations of endearment and pity, reached my ear, and I felt that I was being supported very tenderly and that my aching head was leaning against what seemed to be a broad shoulder. Still I was too stupid to open my eyes till water was dashed in my face and trickled down my neck. Then I sat up and asked for my handkerchief.

I must have been dreaming about that shoulder, for when I looked about me the three men grouped around on the grass were all at very discreet distances! They looked rather white and

anxious, but I was soon able to rise to my feet and assure them that I was not hurt and could mount at once and ride home.

“And to think that it was a Dutch horse!” I said wonderingly. “What unexpected fire!”

“A rearing horse is not safe for a woman to ride,” interposed Herr Daun. “Klemmy, change the saddle to my beast!”

“It is an axiom of horsemanship that you should ride the horse that threw you,” I insisted with a brave front, though I own that I felt a little shaky from my fall. Moreover, as I looked toward the animal, I fancied that he eyed me knowingly as if saying: “I

have got rid of you once; I shall know how to do it again!" I began to grow a little weak and cold and to feel the courage fast oozing out at my fingers' ends. What if they should take me at my word?

At that moment, through the narrow, tree-lined strip that separated the bridlepath from the road, we saw an automobile approaching,—a large, handsome machine, with chauffeur in showy uniform, which I recognized as that of the Archduchess Manfred of Austria, who is here taking the sea baths. Herr Daun sprang out into the road and hailed it. As the car drew up I could see that the occupants were a stout, genial-looking woman of middle-

age and two younger women, well-dressed and pretty. They seemed to know Herr Daun, for they exchanged cordial and ceremonious greetings in French, and I observed that the older lady addressed him as "Adolphe" and the younger women as "mon Altgrave," while the chauffeur respectfully entitled him "Illustrissime." Then I remembered Baron Falkner had told me that in spite of his having dropped the title, Herr Daun's old friends at court still called him by it.

Evidently he had recounted my mishap to them, for I saw them move aside to make room in the car, while he returned to me and explained: "These ladies are on the way out to Scheven-

ingen, and have kindly offered to take you to your hotel."

I was glad to accept their hospitality, for by this time I realized that I was quite unfit to ride. They made me very comfortable with cushions, one of the younger ladies handed me her smelling-salts, while the older one produced a small flask with an elixir, which she assured me was "quite Dutch and innocent," but which I found to be like the Dutch horse, unexpectedly fiery.

Alick and Herr Daun rode behind us with the horses, but Herr Klemens had jumped up beside the chauffeur and had taken the wheel himself. He may not enjoy automobiling as a sport, but he certainly understands managing a

machine, going so steadily, neither too fast nor too slow, and guiding so skillfully that no one could possibly feel nervous with him.

I noticed that they were very friendly to Herr Klemens. When he had kissed the older lady's hand, she had patted him on the shoulder and familiarly called him "Klemmy," and the younger ladies leaned over and chatted pleasantly with him as he was driving. The coming of our party created quite a sensation at the hotel. The proprietor rushed out, wreathed in smiles and bowing repeatedly. The stately porter, who never unbends for the guests, was bowing nearly to the ground, his eyes half-closed in worshipful ecstasy, and the

gentlemen lounging about the veranda stood up and removed their hats. The ladies responded to all with gracious, pretty bows. I was trying to express my gratitude becomingly to them, when every idea I had was put to flight, for I overheard one of the young women calling Herr Klemens:

“I forgot to tell you that I saw your children just before leaving Vienna, and the dear little things were looking famously.”

I stared in amazement. I was so startled that for a moment it seemed as if my heart actually stood still. Never had it entered my imagination that Herr Klemens might be a married man! Yet at twenty-eight or thirty years of

age he could easily have been married five or six years and have two or three children. But it was very hard to readjust my mind to this new view of him. Evidently his stay at The Hague as a delegate had been so short that he had not felt it worth while to bring his family with him. I grew scarlet with mortification as I recalled how I had teased him and taken him to task for not going with the young girls!

I was very, very weary and my head and shoulders were aching hard from the strain of the fall. I longed to get to my room and on to the sofa and have a little quiet rest, for between the pain, the weariness and the mortification I could not keep back the tears.

“Alick,” I inquired solemnly when my nephew assisted me up the stairs, “was it you who picked me up in the woods?”

“Do I speak German as fluently as that?” he asked with a grin, and then I recalled that the somewhat—er—ardent language I had heard on that occasion was correct German. That put Alick out of the question, and there only remained the Altgraf, for as a respectable married man I must now eliminate Herr Klemens.

“Of course,” added Alick, “I couldn’t help seeing that it was all up with the poor chap! I hope you will be good to him! You must realize what a rarely noble fellow he is and a mighty

pleasant one, too! It has done me a lot of good to know a man like that. Don't be hard on him, auntie!"

Alas! we can not always reason with our hearts. They are stubborn, wayward things!

Oddly enough, I had fancied it was Herr Klemens, rather than the Altgraf, who was having such a good influence over our Alick. They have been very chummy of late.

AUGUST 6TH.

I came down to-day for the first time in three days. Not that I had been much hurt, but the shaking up had left me depressed and irritable, and I had preferred the quiet of my room, with its glorious view over miles of coast line, and the sea breezes blowing in at the open windows. When the two Dauns joined me on the veranda after luncheon I thought it best to take the bull by the horns.

“Why did you never tell me about your children?” I asked Herr Klemens in a reproachful tone. “I am so fond of little ones, but until Archduchess Klotilde mentioned them the other day I didn’t know of their existence.”

He looked at me inquiringly an instant, then smiled brightly.

“I know your sympathy for childhood, but,” and he, too, assumed a reproachful tone, “I do not often get the opportunity to tell you of my interests.”

“Tell me at once, then. How old are they?”

“All ages,” he replied.

“That is unreasonable,” I said.

“There must be an oldest and a youngest, and the oldest can not be very old at best!”

“Oh, all ages within the limits of reason, I mean,” he corrected.

“That, too, is vague. Tell me, at least, how many you have!”

“There were thirty-seven, the last I knew,” was the unexpected answer.

Now Herr Klemens is neither a Mohammedan nor a Mormon, so this statement was rather startling. I glanced toward Herr Daun and saw that this gentleman’s broad shoulders were shaking, though he was trying his best to keep a strictly neutral expression. But he suddenly rose, and with some muttered excuse, moved hastily round the corner of the veranda, whence I soon heard peal upon peal of inextinguishable laughter.

Then I glanced at Herr Klemens and fancied I detected a subdued gleam of mischief in his usually serious blue eyes.

“As you hail from Christian Vienna,” I said, at last, “and not from Constantinople or Utah, I must suppose that you refer to an orphan asylum!”

He grinned broadly. “I have not even the one wife allotted to the Christian, much less a plurality of blessings,” he remarked, and then we both laughed merrily over my misapprehension.

He told me later about their hospital, at the Works, for the employees and their families, to which he had recently added a nursery for crippled children and those deprived of a mother’s care. Many charitably inclined Viennese ladies had taken a great interest in this nursery, but what pleased him most was that the employees themselves had co-

operated in it with such hearty enthusiasm.

“It is fine to see those big, rough workingmen,” he said, “dropping in at spare hours to amuse the children and make little toys for them. If one child is ill, there will be a dozen fellows offering to sit up all night with it.”

It is noticeable how much more friendly Herr Klemens has become since I have let him see that he need not fear I “have eyes for no one but the father,” as Barbara put it. He has quite lost that grave, distrustful look with which he used to watch me.

No, dear Herr Klemens, you need not fear! I have no wish to drive you from your home! Even supposing that his

attentions to me are more serious than he has yet given me any right to think, still I feel I should not come between you and your father. Much as I like him, your blue eyes hold me back—those eyes that always give me strange sensations of having seen them before in some intimate and distant past. If I were a believer in reincarnation, I should think that in a previous existence they had belonged to some one very near and dear to me!

AUGUST 7TH.

I can not understand the way Barbara takes this affair. I was ready to sympathize keenly with her disappointment and wounded pride, but I was not prepared to have her eagerly defend the young officer and throw all the blame on Herr Klemens, with whom she is quite furiously angry, for "butting in," as she calls it. She is so manifestly unjust that I begin to comprehend how the Altgraf felt when he said he could fight for Klemens with the desperation of a tigress defending her young! He deserves better of Barbara, for this is the second time he has rescued her from an unpleasant position. A sweet young girl might do far worse

for herself than to become attached to Klemens Daun! He may not have the courtly grace of his father, or the dashing elegance of Captain von Marrels, but he has a manhood and a comeliness all his own which are very attractive, and he well merits every domestic blessing!

AUGUST 8TH.

How little we know! I wrote that late in the night, and went to sleep with a blessing for Herr Klemens on my lips. Yet, perhaps, at that very hour . . .

Barbara came to me to-day with an air of importance and mystery. I asked her no questions, for I knew she could not hold in long.

“My first instinct about Mr. Klemens proves to be right!” she cried triumphantly. “I may not be very experienced, but when a man steals out of the house two successive nights at midnight, and his father has to go for him at five o’clock in the morning and fetch him home in a cab, sound asleep and so stupefied that he stumbled and nearly fell

going up the steps, you can't tell me that he leads a good life! And to think that he dared insult poor von Marrels!"

"Why, what is this, Barbara! Who told you such a story?"

"Oh, it is true! It is impossible there could be a mistake! Kathleen Bailey saw them with her own eyes! Her room is on the first floor, right over the porter's lodge in the same hotel, and she can see every one come in and go out. Both nights she happened to be awake, and saw them as plain as I see you!"

I could not question her any more. I was sick at heart! If Herr Klemens turns out to be dissipated I can never again have faith in any man! I shall

feel as if I want to go and shut myself up somewhere, away from the world and out of the sight of men, and spend my days till I die praying for the conversion of sinners. Nothing else in life would seem worth while! If there are no just men in the world, let it be burned up like Sodom and Gomorrah—the sooner the better!

AUGUST 9TH.

If I could have met his blue eyes turned on me with their usual bright, steady gaze that Sunday morning, I think I should have believed in him against all evidence. I waited to go to church till the last Mass at twelve o'clock, thinking that both men might accompany me, as on previous Sundays, to the pretty Dutch chapel in the Scheveningen woods. But, alas! there was no sign of either!

Like many another before me, when earthly affairs began to go wrong, I turned to heaven! Even had it not been Sunday, I believe my steps would instinctively have directed themselves toward the church. As I entered its

hospitable precincts I found it crowded to the doors, the air heavy with the odors of incense and flowers, and myriad candles burning around the altar. Then, with a pang of shame, I recalled that on the previous Sunday it had been announced that the devotion of the "Forty Hours" would take place on Friday and Saturday, closing with a procession on Sunday noon. And I had wholly forgotten this in the new interests that absorbed me!

I took my place penitently afar off and, kneeling down, shed many tears of misery, partly for my own faithlessness, and partly of regret for a vanished illusion.

Again I write—how little we know!

The Dutch pastor spoke a few words to his flock that cut deeply into my neglectful heart, thanking them for their loyal and edifying attendance at the beautiful devotions. He spoke of the faithful women and children who had taken turns in watching before the altar during the day, the older men and youths who had formed a guard of honor throughout the evening. Then he told how he had called for twelve volunteers among the young men of the parish, to keep vigil before the altar of their Lord from midnight until the first Mass at five o'clock and how not twelve, but forty-five, had responded to the call! Of these, six were from foreign lands, guests of their beautiful

watering-place. He told in eloquent words how, while other young men were spending the small hours of the night in search of the vain pleasures and follies of the world—too many, alas! in haunts of sin—these young Christian knights were keeping vigil in the sanctuary, watching and praying before the altar of the Lamb of God, the Light of Heaven and the Lamp thereof!

As he spoke, my heart warmed within me. “There are still prophets in Israel who bow not the knee to Baal!” And again the tears fell from my eyes because I had not been worthy to be counted among the faithful women watchers of the day. Then I began to wonder who the six young foreign

knights had been who thus sacrificed their rest, or the idle pleasures of a summer holiday, to long, dark, silent hours of vigil and prayer. And all at once a light broke in upon me, I saw the explanation, and a great joy filled my heart! For, at the procession, the canopy over the Sacred Host was borne by six young laymen, and one of these was—Klemens Daun!

As I walked through the woods on my return from church that morning I heard a step behind me, and waited for the Altgraf to join me. We spoke commonplaces for a while, then I saw him suppress a yawn and I laughed outright.

“I beg your pardon!” he exclaimed,

“but I own that I am very sleepy. I am not a healthy young dog like Klemens, who can turn round and sleep like a drunken man, at any moment, or in any position. At my age, if I must get up at the unusual hour of four, I am awake half the night in anticipation.”

“But why get up at four?” I asked, for though I knew now how things were, yet I wished to be confirmed in my knowledge.

“Because I have a devout son!” he replied. “I also am a Christian and respect the commandments of God and the devotions of the Church, but I am the sort of Christian who would rather be taken to heaven in a chariot than

walk there on his own feet. Klemens, on the contrary, is of the stuff that pilgrims and crusaders were made from,—an all-night vigil appeals to him where it appals me. Yet I have a certain pride that will not permit me to lag too far behind him. I could not pray all night with him, but when the young men watchers received the holy Sacrament together at the five o'clock Mass, I felt that I must be there to kneel at his side. If I am fortunate enough to get to heaven, it will be because my wife and my son shamed me into it!"

I could have sung aloud for the joy that was in my heart! "And while you have been yawning through the day, I have been weeping," I said, though I

must have looked anything but weepy. “I have been shedding some very necessary tears for myself and some most unnecessary ones for other people.” Thereupon I confessed to him my suspicions and sorrows and shortcomings.

He looked amazed, then he turned and scanned me closely. “With you it must be ‘trust all in all, or not at all,’ ” he said. “You would be slow to choose a friend. It is not in your nature to love without the seal of consecration, as it were. I understand you because I have been fortunate enough in my life to be intimately associated with two natures governed, like your own, by reason and conscience but, when once their confidence had been won, capable of the

tenderest transports of affection. One was a woman,—the other, her son—and mine!”

I murmured I know not what of sympathy and comprehension.

“I need not assure you of the latter that he has ever led an irreproachable life. You know that instinctively, and to doubt it, even momentarily, was painful to you. His mother had early trained him in the way he should go, and he showed his love for her by not departing for it. He had a joyous, healthy nature, fond of manly pursuits, but proudly contemptuous of the too common follies of youth. Then, at twenty years of age, he met—his ideal woman!”

There was a wild rebellion in my heart. Somehow I could not bear to hear of Herr Klemens' love-affairs, even though I knew they could only be creditable to him. But I told myself sternly that I must be reasonable, for it would be unnatural that a healthy, normal young man should reach his present age without ever having felt the touch of the tender passion.

“She had the exquisite, blonde, Madonna type of beauty that a very young and romantic man easily mistakes for the expression of all that is pure and lovely in heart and mind. As such, he worshiped her. But I, in my wider experience of the world, was full of distrust and misgivings. I believed her to

be vain and frivolous, emotional and pleasure-loving. Her betrothal to a man of high rank was a hard blow to Klemens, for she had seemed to encourage his suit, but he bore it like a man, believing that she was marrying for love and would be happy, and she still remained enshrined in his heart as the ideal woman.

“Shortly after her marriage she sent for him to come to her. I trembled to see him go. He was young, untried, he loved her, and I mistrusted her intentions. Would he come back to me the same clear-eyed, clean-hearted lad, or must I feel that I could not meet his mother’s eyes in heaven because I had failed to protect his youth and in-

experience? I worked myself up to a frenzy of anxiety and had made up my mind to follow him and save him at any cost, when he returned. His face was white and set, and God forgive me that for a moment I feared it was from the shame of guilt! I should have had more faith in his mother's son! At first, he could not utter a word. Then he broke down and throwing himself into my arms cried: 'Father, speak to me of my angel mother, or I shall distrust all women forever!'"

The Altgraf's voice trembled. He took off his hat and mopped brow and eyes with his handkerchief.

"Oh!" thought I, "the good that a

good woman can do in men's lives, and the evil that an unprincipled woman can do!" and I, too, mopped my eyes and felt as if I could go down on my knees then and there in thanksgiving for that one blessed wife and mother!

"Little by little I drew from him what had happened. Amalia had sent for him to say that she was unhappy, that her marriage had been one of ambition to please her parents, that her love was still for Klemens, and now that she was settled in a home of her own, with all the freedom of a married woman, she would find a way to receive his visits and—reward his love! She spoke as one who had no conception of right or wrong, but held love to be above all.

The veil of illusion fell from his eyes, he gazed at her as one stunned, then, without a word, turned and left her. No tears, no entreaties would stay him. He had loved a creation of his own fancy and she now simply no longer existed for him. The pain of disillusion was keen, but short-lived. It worked an instantaneous cure.”

“But it leaves its traces,” I said softly. “One is never just the same again!”

“You are right,” he answered. “This disillusion and a wider knowledge of the world have left Klemens reserved, embittered, and inclined to be distrustful of women in general. Yet he needs just that softening, refining touch to

perfect his sturdy manhood which only a woman's hand can give. I have long hoped that some sweet young woman would inspire him with confidence and affection before the best years of his manhood were gone, but—”

He paused. The sound of singing floated over the summer air, the sweet refrain of a German folk-song trolled forth in mellow, manly tones. We turned and waited for Klemens to overtake us. We three walked home together, the father happy over my friendliness and confidence in the son, while the son on his side was full of friendliness and confidence toward me. It seemed as if we might be a very happy family together, if only—

AUGUST 10TH.

After the usual symphony concert of the Berlin Philharmonic orchestra this evening, we sat out watching the fireworks. The ocean was calm as a mirror and the showers of colored lights were marvelously reflected from the inky blackness of its surface. Herr Daun was not with us,—doubtless he was sleeping!—but Herr Klemens took his father's place and never stirred from my side. It made me think of a faithful watch-dog guarding his master's property! The young man's grave, beautiful eyes looked into mine from time to time with a tender friendliness that puzzled me and set me thinking.

As we were parting he said low and earnestly, "We have but one more evening together before you leave for Saint-Moritz. May we not hope that it will not be the last? that you will not think it an impertinence if we follow you, but that you will give us your permission to do so?"

"My permission?" I repeated inquiringly, a little startled by the expression, and hesitating to commit myself by such definite encouragement.

But Herr Klemens is quick to observe and very sensitive. He became as pale as he well could under his healthy coat of tan and his happy, tender expression turned to one of sudden anxiety.

"If you do not wish it," he said, with

a certain proud resentment, "you have but to say the word and we should not dream of intruding."

But in spite of his proud bearing, there was a pleading look in his blue eyes that unnerved me. Impulsively I held out my hand and said: "How could I feel it an intrusion? I am only glad that you wish to come."

He bowed over my hand and kissed it respectfully and the anxious look in his eyes turned to one of hope and joy. It has made me very thoughtful. Is it possible that I have misunderstood Herr Klemens hitherto? that I have misread his expression? that the anxious, wistful look I used to see in his eyes does not mean: "You should

not come between my father and me!" but rather should be interpreted: "My father and I are lonely! Will you not come and cheer up the home that has been so long without a woman's presence?"

It seems to me that I would do much to make Herr Klemens happy, and that if I do not now love his father quite in the way I dreamed of loving a husband, yet the God who brought our paths together for some purpose of His own, will surely teach my heart its lesson in good time, and give me grace to bring sunshine into these men's home, so long bereft of woman's love and care. If I should fail Herr Klemens now, I feel as if I should be

haunted to my grave by that pleading
look in his big anxious blue eyes!

* * * * *

I could not rest to-night, and throwing my bath-robe about me, I sat long by my window looking out over the quiet, dark sea, so intensely dark, save for the sudden illumination of long, thread-like lines of pale green, opal and silver phosphorescence where the tiny ripples curled their slender crests to meet the sands. Their murmuring song alone broke the breathless silence. The mysterious light, the soothing music of the wavelets, somehow lulled me into the land of visions, and brought back the memory of the little dream-babies. It is long since I have thought of them.

Indeed, I had purposely driven the dream far from my mind as morbid and unwholesome, for it then seemed to belong wholly to the realm of the visionary and impossible. But now—who knows?

Poor, little, wee dearies! longing to be born into this sad, heartless, disappointing world, as if life were a great privilege—not knowing what a very small proportion of happiness, and what a large proportion of care and pain and disillusion it holds! Ah! but—I must remember—they did not ask for earthly happiness! They asked only to love and be loved, they asked for little souls to fit them, not for mortal but for heavenly joys, to enable them to

know and serve God on earth, that they might find their happiness with Him in eternity! They asked for human love and divine service, with all that these entail of sorrow and self-denial and toil, for the sake of the exceeding great reward hereafter—beyond all “that eye hath seen, and ear hath heard or the heart of man conceived!” They know, these babies, the worth of this reward, for of such little ones it is written that “their angels see the face of God!”

No wonder then, that the poor little innocents were full of trouble, when the fate that had given them but one chance of being mothered had ironically sent them to my lonely hearth! No

wonder, then, that there was such a pleading look in their big anxious blue eyes!

* * * * *

I sank down by the window, all trembling and tearful. For now I understand! Oh, Klemens! Klemens! *it is you!*

* * * * *

Dear little dream-babies! you have chosen well! No cleaner, kinder, manlier, more healthy and God-fearing husband could I find to honor and cherish in fondest ideal than this same man who looks at me out of your own blue eyes! Yet, how can it be? For it does not seem right to me from any point of view! How can it be right, when

I am at least five or six years his senior, when I have so little knowledge of his country, his people, and their ways? Herr Klemens should marry a younger woman, should marry—

But I find I do not like to conjure up the picture of Herr Klemens' young wife! Whomever he marries, may God bless him: I must not be foolish and superstitious, to place so much faith in an idle vision “ 'twixt sleeping and waking.” A dream—is but a dream!

But, alas! the dream will not have left me where I was. No longer can I think of entering their home as the Altgraf's wife! I must, perhaps, give a fine and noble man, whom I like and respect, a deep and undeserved pain,

one that I could have spared him but for this vision of blue eyes! Oh, Klemens! Klemens! you love your father dearly, and never must you know that you stand between him and his happiness! I could have married him with my fancy free, but now—I love his son—with all the strength of my woman's heart!

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AUGUST 11TH.

After a sleepless night I was having coffee in my room when I saw Herr Klemens walk out on to the pier and board the steamer for — This means an all-day trip. I can not understand! I—I had been looking forward to our usual meetings during this, our last day at the seashore, and I am not reconciled to the disappointment. It seems as if I must rush after him and call him back! Is he going in order to leave the coast clear for his father? Oh, my unhappy dream! How can I meet his father again? I feel like a traitor. He will have every right to reproach me. God help us all!

* * * * *

Herr Daun joined us as usual in our afternoon ride. When we had dismounted he asked me to take a short walk with him, and we went just as we were in our riding costumes. For a moment I had hesitated, cowardly anxious to put off what I feared was inevitable, then I gathered my courage, determined to face the trouble and to come to an understanding, painful as it must be to both. It is an injustice to prolong a false situation.

I would not go into the woods or on the dunes; they seemed to invite sentiment. I chose rather the pier, where there is constant passing. Riding-dress is extremely becoming to Herr Daun, making him look both younger and

slighter. Knowing him as I now do, I felt it would be an easy task to become attached to him—if only one's heart were free! Indeed, for an instant, the blue eyes whose earnest gaze had so often come between us seemed to grow dim and strangely far away.

“If,” said the Altgraf, suddenly, as he attentively scrutinized the fishing-boats in the offing, “if the Angel Gabriel came down from heaven and announced that you must choose between two men—one old enough to be your father, the other several years your junior—you would unhesitatingly choose the younger man, would you not?”

This was such an unexpected turn in

the affair that it took my breath away. I gasped and knew not what to reply. At last I said with a poor attempt at a laugh: "It is to be hoped that the Angel Gabriel would take the relative ardor of their wishes into consideration, and not make an unwilling sacrifice of either of them."

"You are begging the question," he said reproachfully. "That is not worthy of you. I have a right to a frank answer."

"I can not answer off-hand," I apologized. "I should hesitate long. I should have many conscientious scruples about choosing one so much my junior both from the point of view of his interests and my own pride."

“You think Klemens too young for your serious consideration?”

“No, it is the other way. I think myself too old for his serious consideration.”

There was a short silence. Herr Daun lost his interest in the fishing-boats and began studying his riding-whip.

“You have been slow in learning to take Klemens’ devotion to you at its full value,” he said, at last, “yet I have told you enough of his history for you to understand that he is not one who interests himself easily in women. How have you explained his regard for you?”

I hesitated. I could not well tell him

that I had thought the young man interested in me as a possible stepmother!

“Oh, younger men often admire older women,” I replied evasively. “I suppose they feel at ease with them because they can enjoy their society without being thought to have serious intentions.”

“And I suppose,” he suggested dryly, “that you, on the other hand, ‘felt at ease’ with me and ‘enjoyed my society,’ believing that I could not ‘have serious intentions’ since I was old enough to be your father?”

“Perhaps so,” I stammered guiltily. It is well to tell the truth and nothing but the truth, but how can one always tell the whole truth?

“There is one thing, however, which you have too easily taken for granted,” he continued. “You were sensitively conscientious in discouraging a man you believed to be much younger than yourself. Neither he nor I quite understood your attitude until a recent remark of your brother’s showed me that you were under the impression that Klemens was not over thirty.”

I looked up inquiringly.

“As a matter of fact there is very little difference in your ages. You were thirty-five last spring, Klemens will be thirty-five the end of this month.”

So I had thought myself his senior by from five to seven years, and in reality

there is less than five months' difference between us!

“But how can that be?” I asked incredulously. “You look scarcely old enough to be his father even at thirty.”

“Thank you for your flattery;” he smiled, “but if my eldest son were living he would now be thirty-six. I married young, but I am fifty-nine; in other words already in my sixtieth year.”

“It is hard to believe it,” I murmured. And indeed, though he is stout and gray, one would never credit him with more than fifty-two or three years, and in that trim, becoming riding-suit he might easily pass for forty-five.

“So you see, I am quite beyond your consideration!” he declared gayly,

“whereas Klemens enters into the category of eligibles! Nevertheless, I make you a formal offer of my venerable heart and hand!”

“But of all the queer ways of doing the thing!” I exclaimed. “You are laughing, and I ought to be angry with you.”

“I admit it is a queer way,” he said, still most good-humoredly, “but you must blame Klemens. It is his way, not mine.”

“Now I am truly angry!” I cried with tears in eyes and voice. “You are putting me in a very painful and undignified position. It is not a laughing matter!”

He grew grave at once. He placed

a chair for me and drew up one for himself, then, leaning forward, began poking at the boards with his riding-stick. "I will be more explicit," he said seriously, "and you will see that I am not jesting. Let us go back to the very first day here. Klemens was fascinated from the start. He could talk of nothing but you, and even as he called my attention to you, I could see where his heart was, and I saw it gladly."

"Gladly!" I echoed incredulously. "How could you be glad to see your only son lose his heart to a middle-aged woman, a foreigner, a stranger to your country and its ways? No! You could not be glad!"

"I was glad," he replied steadily,

“because it was the first time since the unhappy affair of his early youth that he had looked at any woman with more than superficial interest. From the first glance you had won his esteem, his confidence, his affection. I could understand how it was with him,” he added, lifting his head and gazing earnestly out to the horizon. “I too felt all the attraction of your mind, manner, and character. But I had my heart under control. I would not permit myself to become attached to you. For my son loved you. He was no longer a boy to be carried away by an illusion, but a strong, sensible man in his prime, who was for the first time surrendering mind and heart and soul to sacred and long

pent-up emotions. He would not soon recover from such a passion. But my regard for you was more calm, more friendly more—er—fatherly. It would be more natural for you to love him than to love a man of my age. You would have loved him long since had you not been so sensitive about the supposed disparity in your years."

I had been blind indeed, blind and stupid! I had been a vain fool to suppose that this man, at his age and with his devotion to the memory of an adored wife, would wish to marry me! I had been dull indeed not to notice that his conversation had always been of Klemens! My cheeks burned as I realized that he must have understood

my foolish expectation, and felt in honor obliged to give me this opportunity of refusing him, even in jest!

“During the few days we were absent at Ostend,” he resumed. “I could see that Klemens was restless and unhappy, that he missed the interest of watching you, that he longed to come back and see more of you. We talked things over frankly together. It is a habit we have had from his boyhood, and it has been good for us both. We decided that we should return here and obtain a formal introduction to you, and see whether his extraordinary attraction would ripen into a genuine passion for a good and charming woman, and if so, that he might have an opportunity to try and

win you. It was a happy omen that you met him so cordially on our return."

Again I blushed vividly as I recalled my impulsive greeting to the young stranger.

"And what would he have done had I not greeted him?" I asked with curiosity.

"We need not speculate about that. Klemens is full of energy and determination where he sees his way clear. He has not been himself during his courtship of you, because he has not seen clearly and has been full of hesitations. He is a foolish fellow, foolishly devoted to his father, foolishly anxious that the woman he loves should be happy, even at the cost of his dearest

hopes and dreams. He fancied that you scarcely noticed him, and that you—forgive me! it was his absurd notion—that you were attracted to his father, and he was ready to surrender you to me! Even more inconsiderate in disposing of you than The Angel Gabriel, was he not?" And the Altgraf laughed quite heartily and began to twirl his unfortunate riding-stick. I never before saw him so fidgety. He is usually most quiet and well-poised.

"I, of course, knew better," he went on. "You and I were the best of comrades for the very reason that there was no question whatever of sentiment between us. Is it not so?"

"Yes, indeed!" I answered readily.

“I have always admired and liked you extremely, more than any one but Klemens himself, yet always as a delightful friend. And your feeling for me has been a purely fatherly one from the first.”

“A purely fatherly feeling from the first!” he echoed steadily, looking out to sea with grave eyes. There was a short silence, then he turned, kissed my hand, and thanked me in an agitated voice for the honor I had done them both in accepting his son’s offer.

“But—but he has made me no offer!” I objected.

“He is making it through me,” replied the father. “It is not unusual

with us Austrians for a parent to speak for the son."

"But I don't like being won by proxy!" I complained. "Besides, I thought it was the offer of your own heart and hand you asked me to consider."

"So it was! So it was!" he agreed, "but we have got that out of the way! Klemens insisted that I should speak for both. He said it was wholly a question of what was for your happiness, and that we must give you the opportunity to decide for yourself. It was, as you remarked in the beginning, a queer way of doing the thing, but it was the only way to satisfy Klemens, who can be very obstinate on occasion.

I promised him that I would speak plainly and unreservedly. I have done so, have I not?"

"You have been very frank," I replied laughingly, "but you ran a certain risk! I might have accepted you, and what would you have done then?"

"What should I have done then?" he repeated, and there was a curious flash in his great gray eyes that startled me. I began to realize that this was a question which should have been left unasked, even as a jest. But the look was gone in an instant, never to return again.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I had a heart for either fate—I am very philosophical, you should be convinced

of that!" he said lightly. Then, more seriously, "But believe me, I did not mock you with an empty offer! The fires of youth are not burnt out, they are only covered by the ashes of years and sorrow—a breath would rekindle them! Yet this way is best! Klemens will be happy, and I shall learn to find my happiness in his, in the companionship of a charming daughter, and in the love of little grandchildren. And you—how shall it be? Will you come and take your place as mistress of our home, leaving the old father a corner where he can end his days near his beloved ones? Or shall Klemens make a new home for you?"

"Oh, do not let it make any change!"

I cried eagerly. "You will remain master of the house, as you have always been. I am so ignorant of Austrian ways and customs that Klemens would be badly off if left to my mercies! It would make me miserable to think that I had separated you two from each other. Can I not fit in somehow without disturbing the old home life so dear to you both?"

"We can try," he said kindly. "It is a large house and the servants have been with us many years. It will be easier at first for you to be, as it were, our beloved guest. Later the reins will fall into your hands naturally. I shall not disturb you much. I have my own sitting-room, I have my office at the

Chancery and my Club. I am fond of travel; I shall be often away. You will almost be able to forget that you have—a father-in-law.”

* * * * *

God has indeed helped us! As I think it over I am shedding tears of deep, almost awe-struck gratitude. In my poor human way I had made such a sorry mess of the whole affair, until it seemed as if there could be nothing but sadness in store and that I should never see either of these dear friends again! But now—

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AUGUST 12TH.

His boat came in as the sun was setting in a shaft of golden fire, between banks of gray and crimson clouds, reflected in a motionless sea. His father met him at the landing.

A few moments later, their names were announced and they were ushered up to our little parlor, whence all my family had discreetly fled.

They drew near me. I could not look up. The father took my hand and laid it in that of his son, and in broken voice said a few words of blessing in his own name and that of the mother whose spirit would be rejoicing in heaven over her child's happiness. Then he hastily withdrew and left us alone together.

For the first time I dared glance up at Klemens' face. How proudly happy and confident he looked! "Is it true?" he whispered eagerly. "Are you and I indeed to be man and wife?" and the clasp of his hand tightened over mine.

It seemed to me such a sacred moment—I could think of nothing but the wonderful way in which he had been led to me. I laid my other hand on his, and bowing my head, replied gravely: "I believe it is God's will!"

Then I waited. I do not know exactly what it was that I expected, but it certainly did not happen. We stood there awkwardly hand in hand, and when at last I looked up in curiosity I saw that his happy confidence had fled,

and that his eyes were full of puzzled concern. For heaven's sake! what is the man waiting for? Does he expect me to give him the first embrace? If he does he may—expect till Doomsday!

At last he spoke, and his voice was full of hesitancy and trouble as he asked: "And is that your only reason? Do you not want me—a little—for myself?"

It began to dawn on my mind that no matter how God-fearing and conscientious a man may be, if he has any pride and self-respect it is only human nature that he should wish to be valued and desired somewhat for his own personality and not be accepted wholly as an act of resignation to the will of God!

I drew my hands from his and looked up into the honest, anxious blue eyes, and did not know whether I felt most like laughing or crying. Of course he could not know, as I did, how truly this match was of heaven's making! Yet, how could I tell him? I could only fling my arms around his neck and stammer out "I have wanted you and you only, all my life!"

He clasped me stormily to his breast with all the long-pent ardor of his manly heart. "And I have worshiped you, and you only, all my life!" he cried. And each understood the other's meaning without further need of words.

Our first walk together, in the crimson glow of that wonderful sunset, was

to the little church in the woods. It was his suggestion, though it was also my unspoken wish. I am afraid my prayers were a little incoherent, but the angels understood! Oh, Klemens! my treasure! I am a lucky, lucky woman, and I have the grace to appreciate it. God has been good to give us to each other! God has been good!

* * * * *

A very surprised man was Gilbert when the Altgraf sought him out a little later that evening.

“You have been very sly!” he said when he came up to give me his hearty felicitations. “So it was the son! and all the time I had thought it was the father!”

“I am taking the son on your recommendation,” I declared laughingly. “I had lost my heart to the father till you called my attention to the young man’s eyes. It was the eyes that decided me!” And that is quite true!

* * * * *

FOUR YEARS LATER.

There is a saying that no house is large enough for two families, but I can bear witness that it may be so when one of the families consists solely of a father-in-law!

During the first year of our married life the Altgraf left us much to ourselves, finding occasion to make many long visits away from home. But as the days and the years go on, we drift closer and closer together, and he spends ever more and more time with us. He is still the master of the house, but everything is carefully planned for our independence. He has his suite of rooms, and we have ours, yet it ends in our being almost constantly together,

father and son in friendly companionship, as of old, except that the affectionate daughter and wife is always by, happy in feeling herself the confidential friend of each. And so we are now no longer two families, but three generations of one united, tenderly loving family.

* * * * *

But there is one thing that puzzles me! The little lad and lassie that have found their way to our home in these four blessed years are as sturdy and happy and sweet as mother could wish—with their round, dimpled faces and big eyes and enchanting smiles they look as wise as owls and as merry as kittens, but—*their eyes are not blue!*

It gives me a strange feeling, as if they must be the wrong babies, and that perhaps the little blue-eyed dream-children may still be wandering about in the cold! Yet the darlings have brought so much love and happiness into our home, they fit so beautifully into our lives, as if made to order and warranted to suit, that I can not think there is any mistake. I must ask them. They will know how to tell me, for “out of the mouths of babes—”

* * * * *

I have asked them! They were cuddled up in my arms last evening, ready for bed in their little nighties, prayers said, kissed and blessed by papa and grandpapa after a famous

romp, and then deposited in my lap for a last hug. Their chubby, rosy, dimpled faces were turned up to mine, and they were looking lovingly at me, the boy out of big, brown eyes which I can see well enough are my own, and the girl with her grandfather's eyes, of what Miss Austen would describe as "a lively hazel."

"How did it happen," I asked them, "that you both came right here to me, instead of to another of the many mammas in this big, wide world?"

Baby Clementine is too young yet to express herself in anything but monosyllabic coos and gurgles. Little three-year-old Ernst, however, who prattles in both German and English, grew

troubled and anxious, and his lips quivered a bit as he answered in his cooing, sweet little voice:

“God sent we here, mamma! We touldn’t go any uzzer where! Didn’t ‘ou want we?”

I smothered the darlings with hugs and kisses and tears, till there could be no possible doubt of their welcome left in the childish hearts, while Klemens knelt beside me and had his arms round all three of us. And I understood now that if, in the vision, they had appeared to have blue eyes, it was only the better to guide me to the dearly loved father of their choice!

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